Forever Yours, Nocturnal Me

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Summary

Work never seems to end for Special but, since the Third Emeritus got in charge, he's been distracted.

Notes

So, second installment of If You Have Ghosts series! I recommend you to read the first one, The Path Of The Firstborn, since it's the continuation. Big thank you at @ghostsxghoul and @copias-gloves for proofreading and coping with my bullshit once again ;D

See the end of the work for more notes.
A lot has happened on the Church's grounds during these last few years: the beginning of the Ghost project with the rise of two Papas as well as Sister Imperator’s success in summoning Ghouls. However, every rise to power had its downfall. In the Unholy Church of Emeritus, Second had failed his responsibilities of carrying out his duties along with the death of a few ghouls, due to the weak construction of their vessels. But, with a new Papa in training and an upgraded vessel for the new Ghouls, the Church believed that a brighter future would be waiting in the following years.

Seven small Ghouls lied down on the summoning altar, surrounded by blood and pieces of flesh that fell off their new vessels during the ritual. Special, summoned the day before and now resting securely in Papa Nihil’s arms, watched the Third Emeritus, as well as Sister Imperator, approach the kits to make sure everything went smoothly. Having actual bodies instead of skeletons as their vessels was way more painful than the first time, but it was clear that the clergy higher-ups would do everything in their power to take better care of these Ghouls than the ones they had before. As expected, one Ghoul of each element was summoned, but there was something that the higher-ups weren’t expecting.

“There are two Water Ghouls…” the Third whispered when he approached the altar. His gloved hands picked up the second Water kit and handed it to Imperator, who widened her eyes in surprise.

“And it’s not only two Water Ghouls… we summoned a Ghuleh” she added before turning her head to Nihil, “It’s almost impossible to get one, they are extremely rare…”

“We should consider ourselves honored, Sister” Papa Nihil approached her with a smile on his lips.

“I know that Ghulehs are extremely dangerous if not handled properly…” Imperator’s gaze averted to meet the Third’s mismatched eyes. “I will take care of her, if you don’t mind”.

“At all, Sister” the youngest Emeritus shook his head and continued examining the new kits.

Alpha and Omega still had their symbols branded into their chests, Air seemed like the previous one—he didn’t even cry when he came to life—, the new Water Ghoul looked like a teddy bear and the new Earth Ghoul was way smaller than the previous one. But there was another surprise awaiting for the clergy higher-ups when the Third picked up the last Ghoul: it had a heart-shaped spade on his tail, like Special. Imperator dropped her jaw in shock: it happened again. She couldn’t help but feel frustrated, since non-elementals had no place in the band. Special would keep his job as a spokesperson and tour manager when he becomes of age, but there was no hope for the new one.

“I couldn’t kill the Firstborn because… well, he was the first Ghoul ever summoned, but we don’t really need this one” she commented, her gaze still on the kit. “He’s… useless”.

As he heard those words, the Third Emeritus became horrified. He didn’t think that Imperator would be capable of such a thing, to end a fragile creature’s life just because he had no purpose in the church. He held the Ghoul closer to his chest, trying his hardest to find a reason why Imperator shouldn’t carry on with her plans.

“II’ll find him something!” he blurted out, his voice was a clear signal that he was desperate and anxious, “I’ll give him a cowbell if it’s necessary! But I beg you, Sister, don’t kill him! He’s my Ghoul!”

Their argument was cut short by Papa Nihil, who stepped between them. He too had been trying to
find a purpose for the non-elemental Ghoul, as he wasn’t fond of murdering such young lives.

“I’ll try to find him church duties when he grows up” he spoke in a calm tone, his hand brushing the kit’s iron cheek, “maybe he could even assist Special in his duties. I’m sure he will be happy to have some help”.

The Third Emeritus nodded and looked down on his kits, all of them. It was a huge responsibility: those Ghouls needed taming, as well as training to play their instruments and to use their powers, but he didn’t want to make the same mistakes as his brothers. Their Ghouls were truly servants who saw each other like objects, like brainless minions that followed their Papa around. He won’t allow his to be like them.

A few weeks have passed and the kits reached the age of six, if speaking in human years. A soft pitter-patter echoed through the abbey halls as Special rushed to the nursery, excited to meet the band Ghouls again. Papa Nihil had kept him busy, trying to discover how much he remembered of his previous duty as the Church’s spokesghoul, and made sure the young one received proper education. However, Special was still a kit and spending so many hours with his caretaker only made him feel lonely, just like the first time: he wanted to make new friends. He could remember that he wasn’t supposed to talk to the band Ghouls under the Second Emeritus’s Era, and he hoped for the Third to be more relaxed with his rules.

The clergy thought that, since the new gaggle of Ghouls seemed healthy enough, they would try and summon more ‘servants’ just to assist the Siblings of Sin during their church duties, here the need to build a nursery in the abbey. It wasn’t very big, but it was equipped with the necessary tools and personnel to take care of the newly summoned kits. The band Ghouls had their own room inside the facilities, so the Third would receive assistance from the Siblings of Sin in charge if he needed it.

The Brother of Sin behind the desk smiled when he saw Special making his way in, standing on his toes to turn the door knob and approaching the desk with big, shiny eyes. The Ghoul was excited to reunite with Alpha and Omega again: he missed them so much and he just hoped they would remember him as well. The man lead him into the band Ghouls’ room and closed the door behind him.

His eyes glanced around, noticing that the kits had their symbols embroidered on their choir cassocks—the usual uniform for young kits in learning age— and he spotted Omega and Alpha chatting with the Water Ghoul, who they referred as Delta. I suppose the Third has renamed him so they wouldn’t mix him up with the old Water, Special thought as he approached them with a huge smile on his lips. It wasn’t visible, but they could tell by the shine in his eyes.

“Hi! My name is Special!” he chirped excitedly. “I’m Papa Nihil’s Ghoul. I know who Omega, Alpha an Air are, we used to be friends before we were resummoned”

“We were?” Alpha asked, tilting his head. As expected, Special saw that they couldn’t remember a single thing from their past lives. It was painful for him, but expected: he would find the way to trigger their memories back.

A rather smaller Ghoul approached Special with big eyes, his tiny hands cupping his face with curiosity. It was the Earth Ghoul, the one they called Leaf, a little nosy fellow, one might add, who always seemed to stick his tiny iron nose where it didn’t belong.

“You have weird eyes” he stated, his tiny brows furrowing, “do you have an element?”
“Uhhh…” Special hesitated and shook his head, “Not really, but I’m being trained to handle the church paperwork”.

“Oh” Leaf blinked and let him go, resting his hands on his hips. His tone was a bit too cocky for the older Ghoul too, “You’re not really that special, Mist hangs out with Imperator. And we have a non-elemental too. He’s a weirdo”.

The Earth Ghoul pointed to a badly lit corner of their room, where a taller and slender kit was sitting. He seemed fascinated by his own hands and he entertained himself pulling at his tiny claws. Special left the group, who resumed their chatting, and crouched down next to him: he was wearing the same choir cassock as the rest of them, but didn’t seem as lively.

“Hi!” The older kit greeted him “I’m Special, who are you?”

“Cowbell” he replied, still tugging at his fingers, “I don’t have an element, so I’m a bit of an outcast”.

“They outcasted you? But it’s terrible!” Special gave him a worried look. Could he be one as well since they both were in the same situation?

However, the other kit seemed unfazed by it. Cowbell shrugged and bent his fingers the opposite way, showing them to Special who made a painful grimace hidden behind his mask. A lightbulb went off as soon as his fingers resumed a normal position.

“Can you keep a secret?” Cowbell’s purple eyes stared deeply into Special’s soul, “I know a hidden place that I want to show you”.

Before the older kit could respond, Cowbell held his hand and dragged him away from their room in the nursery. Special didn’t ask any questions, he just stared at his new friend in awe. They just met each other and he already took him in an adventure? It might be because Special worried about his situation. Cowbell pushed the library door and lead the way towards the very back of the room near the forbidden archives, next to an exaggeratedly large bookcase. The taller kit pulled away a few books to reveal a small opening, he crawled inside and gestured at Special to follow him. It was a tunnel that lead to a small crawl space full of pillows and a lightbulb. The older Ghoul stared in awe at his surroundings: he had no idea this place existed.

“How did you find it?”

“I like coming here. One day they rearranged all the books and I discovered it. This is my reading spot”

The kit grabbed a few pillows and made chairs for them two, he then picked up a book and gestured Special to sit with him. Cowbell opened it and began reading it to him; judging by the excitement in his voice and the passion he put into the reading, it was obvious that he loved that book. He would stop now and then to explain sentences and resume once he made sure that Special was following the story. The older kit’s opinion about him changed completely as he discovered they had more things in common than he thought: they both enjoyed reading, they were different from the band Ghouls and they were loners.
Cowbell’s stomach rumbled and he closed his book, laughing nervously. “Are you hungry?” He asked; Special nodded at him. “I know a tunnel that leads to the kitchen. They usually have a lot of snacks for me”. The younger kit left the book where he found it, crawled to an air vent —another one of his secret passageways— and told his friend to follow.

“I have a question…” Special stopped and sat down on the floor, “Why are you called Cowbell?”

“I don’t know, Papa gave me that name” he tilted his head and shrugged, “He was the one who told me about these secret tunnels, he discovered them when he was a little kit. Can you believe Papa was a kit too?”

Special chuckled and resumed crawling behind his friend until they reached the kitchen. The smell of stew opened the older kit’s nostrils and he could feel his stomach growl: he was truly starving. It was the human clergy members’ turn to eat and their food looked even better than the odd pureé the kits
got served almost daily. Cowbell helped him out of the air vent and brought a finger to his mask.

“You can’t tell about the tunnels to anybody, okay?”

“Who would I tell? I thought Omega and Alpha would remember me and our friendship but…” Special tugged at his cassock with sad eyes. “They don’t. I feel so lonely…”

“You don’t have to be, I am your friend now!” Cowbell replied before hugging him, scooping him up and spinning around with him, “I also have a lot of friends around the church, I can introduce them all to you”.

“Would you do that for me?”

Cowbell nodded and turned around when he heard somebody calling for him. It was a Sister of Sin with fiery red hair, who cooed at him and at Special. She scooped both of them up, sat them on the counter and gave them a plate for them to snack on. The older Ghoul was enjoying the food while he watched Cowbell chat with the red-headed Sister. They had known each other for a while and she was more than welcome to give treats to him and any friend he brought. That made him feel so good, so wanted…

“Did you know?” Cowbell’s voice brought him back to reality, “I have my own book collection, but it’s missing so many books… Sister says that she will take me to the book shop in town. Papa says I can’t go alone, but maybe you can come with me!”

“I would love to! I love reading!” Special chirped and glanced over the wall clock. It was late, he should be at Nihil’s office for his training, “I need to go with Papa, do you want to come with me?”

The taller kit nodded and gave the empty plate back to the Sister with the red hair, jumping off the counter afterwards. Special ran as fast as he could to the office—he didn’t like being late— and knocked twice before opening the door. Papa Nihil had his arms folded over his chest and a look of disapproval on his face; in front of him, the Third Emeritus lifted his shoulders and lowered his head like a child receiving a scolding. The older Anti-Pope’s expression changed to a warm smile when he saw the two kits at the door.

“Oh, hello little one” he reached a hand to pet Special’s hair and kept his eyes on Cowbell, “I’m a bit busy right now, so we’ll resume your training later. I see you have a new friend, why don’t you show him your room?”

The older Ghoul chirped and waved them goodbye before walking out of the office. Cowbell just hugged the Third Emeritus’s leg and followed after his friend, who lead him to the highest tower of the church where his room was. The taller kit stared in awe: the room was almost as big as his Papa’s, with its own balcony, a large bed with a ridiculous amount of pillows and stuffed toys and a desk with a pile of books that came out of the huge bookshelf next to it. Special jumped over his bed, picked up his favourite teddy bear and patted the spot next to him.

“This whole room is yours?” Cowbell stared around in awe, “I have to sleep with the rest of the band Ghouls, Papa says it’s important we know how to share… But I don’t like it so I sleep in my secret cave”.

Special had no idea where his secret cave was nor did he want to know. It must be hard for him to spend so much time with peers that didn’t like him, but Cowbell seemed too immersed in his own world to care. The older Ghoul jumped off the bed to pick up his favourite book to show him: The Grimm Brothers’ Fairy Tales.
“Have you read this one?”

“No! Can you read it to me?” Cowbell asked, making himself comfortable on the bed.

Special sat down, picked up his favourite teddy bear and opened the book to the page of Snow White. When he started reading, he noticed Cowbell snuggling up to him and looking at the book pictures with interest. The older Ghoul remembered when he taught Omega and Alpha how to read, the way they rested their heads on his shoulders as they drifted off to sleep. When he finished the tale, Cowbell had his eyes closed and was in deep slumber. Special left the book on his nightstand, pulled the bed blanket over them and joined his friend in a short power nap.

When the older Ghoul woke up, his friend wasn’t in the room but the empty spot next to him was still warm. The teddy bear sitting on the bed smelled of him, of old books and wood, the smell of the library. He stretched himself out, fixed his cassock and jumped off his bed, running to Nihil’s office. Maybe he would have stopped scolding his son and perhaps they could resume their training. The old Anti-Pope was still talking with the Third Emeritus and had a stern look on his face. However, they didn’t seem to notice the kit standing at the door.

“What do you mean they outcasted him!?” Nihil asked. He seemed furious, something unusual on him, “How many times have I asked you to tame them, Stronzino !?”

“Excuse me, Father, but Cowbell has no place in the band. That’s a first” The Third tried to defend himself, “Second of all, I don’t want my Ghouls to end up burned out like my brothers’. I know what I’m doing!”

“Ghouls aren’t friends, they are servants!” The former Papa threw his hands in the air before seeing Special out of the corner of his eye. His expression changed completely and he crouched down to pick him up on his arms, “Special has no element, but he’s useful for the church. Cowbell is a scholar like him, don’t let his talent go to waste”.

The Third Emeritus bowed his head and walked out, holding Cowbell by his hand. Once he closed the door behind his back, Nihil sat Special on his desk and resumed his training. The kit couldn’t help but think about what the Third said. He just met Cowbell, but he saw potential in him, he could write and read. Maybe he won’t be able to play in the band, but he could do other things. Special felt a bit sad when he walked out of the office and headed to the band Ghouls’ room in the nursery.

When he got there, he heard the Third giving them a talking to, even to Mist. All of them had their heads lowered and they were toying with their choir cassocks, Delta was even at the verge of tears but Cowbell was nowhere to be found. After the Third left the room, they sat down on the playground rug in a circle and made a spot for Special. Omega was the first one to speak.

“You’re back! We thought the creep killed you!”

“He isn’t a creep!” The older Ghoul started waving his hands around, “He is very smart, he can read! We looked at books together!”

Special thought the mention of reading would trigger Omega and Alpha’s memories back, but it didn’t work. They started chatting about their things and the older Ghoul just spaced out. He felt truly lonely with them, it was like he didn’t even know them. Leaf tried to get his attention.

“So, what do you do at Papa Nihil’s office, Spesh?”

“So, uh… I get training” he replied, but he had to get them interested with something funny. He then
remembered what he saw before, “I spent a few hours there today and I saw the Third getting scolded by Papa”.

“No way! He got scolded?” Mist’s eyes opened wider, “Why?”

“I will tell you why, Misty” the small Earth Ghoul folded his arms, “He can’t do his job right and then he scolds us for being as bad as him”.

“That’s a bit hype-crate… hypocrite of him!” Omega balled his fists and stomped his feet, “But I guess he’s not used to it. Let’s just stay in our best behavior and make it easy for him”.

“Hell no!” Leaf jumped up to his feet, “Don’t you realize how much power we have? We can be as bad as him and he can’t say anything about it!”

“But the Third is our boss!” Delta jumped in Omega’s defense.

Leaf growled at them and had to be held back by Air and Mist while Alpha joined Omega and Delta’s side. Special was in the middle of the fight, his eyes glancing over the two sides as he held up his hands to stop them. The Earth Ghoul freed himself from his fellow Ghouls’ grasp and jumped on Omega, tackling him to the floor and scratching his mask with his claws.

“Stop it!” Special yelled, waving his hands to get their attention, “The Third got in trouble because you outcasted a Ghoul! He deserves an apology!”

“Apologize to Papa or Cowbell?” Leaf got back up to his feet, “Okay, we’ll say sorry to Papa but the freak doesn’t deserve an apology. He’s useless, he can’t even play an instrument! I think non-elementals have no place in here, they shouldn’t exist”.

Special’s eyes filled with tears. He hated hearing his fellow kits insulting his best friend like that, but it hurt even more when he realized their insults could be directed at him too: he didn’t have an element either, he wasn’t in the band. Did that mean that he should stop existing too? It was too late, he was already crying in front of them. Omega sat up on the floor and wanted to say sorry, but the older Ghoul barged out of the door before he could even say anything.

He looked for Cowbell all over the church before realizing he could be in his favourite place: the library. The taller kit was looking for new books to borrow, focused in his world of fantasy when he heard his friend calling for him. He thought it would be funny to hide and wait until he got closer to jump out and spook him, but Special didn’t think so. He got startled and scooted away from him, now openly bawling his eyes out.

“It’s not funny!”

“I… I’m sorry…” Cowbell’s expression went from playful to worried and he began twiddling his thumbs, “What happened?”

“The band kits won’t stop saying mean things about you and our kind” the older kit hiccuped, trying his best to regain his composure, “I hate it, it’s not nice!”

“Oh…” the taller kit’s voice trailed, “Well, Papa says I’m as important as elemental Ghouls and so are you”.

Cowbell approached his friend and wrapped his arms around him in a tight hug; it was more hurtful to see him like that that any insult or slur the band Ghouls might have said about him. The gesture itself made Special realize how touch-starved he was: it felt so good and warm, he didn’t want to let go, but the memories about what his fellow kits said about Cowbell brought him to the verge of tears
“I don’t want them to say you’re a freak…”

“But I like being a freak. It makes me stand out” the taller kit held his hands, “Plus, I can read and they don’t”.

“How do you do that? How can you ignore people making fun of you?”

“I just assume they are jealous of me and they want to bring me down.”

Special sighed and let him go, kind of embarrassed. He was truly jealous of his carefree spirit, of how he didn’t overthink things too much, or not at all. He turned around and waved his hand at him before heading to Nihil’s office again, but the taller kit tugged at his cassock.

“How do you wanna come and fight dragons in the forest with me?” his purple eyes shone in excitement.

“Dragons? In the forest? But we’re not allowed outside!” the older kit felt a bit nervous. He wasn’t one to break the rules and he didn’t want to start now, but his friend seemed so excited for a game of pretend that he found it hard to say no.

“They won’t know” he grinned under his mask. He had a tunnel in mind that would let them out of the church unseen.

“Okay, but we kill just one dragon. Papa Nihil must be waiting for me”.

Cowbell went to the back of the library and there was a small hallway that lead to a door. It took them a few turns to find one that lead to the limits of the backyard, just where the cemetery was as well as the path that lead to the forest. The taller kit skipped through the tombstones, saying hello to them while holding his friend’s hand. Once they got there, they picked up fallen branches to use as swords and swung them around to fight the invisible creatures while yelling war cries.

Special leaped into the air and stabbed the ‘dragon’s heart’ before landing back to the floor and rolling around in the grass. He had never felt so excited, so happy to be outside having the time of his life with his new best friend. They held their hands together and spun around to celebrate their victory before dropping themselves back on the ground. Cowbell rolled on his stomach and rested his hands under his chin, his purple gaze still on his friend. He scooted closer to the older kit and nuzzled the side of his mask affectionately until Special rolled over, he then rubbed their noses together.

The large bell on the clocktower rang and Special bursted out of his bubble. He stood up back to his feet and panicked, straightening his cassock with his hands while keeping eye contact with Cowbell.

“I must go! Papa is waiting for me!” his voice came out in a rush, “But I want to play with you tomorrow!”

“You know where to find me” the taller kit sat up and waved his hand at him, “Maybe we can kill more dragons or read another book”.

Special nodded and made his way back inside. He should get his things in his room first before getting to the old Anti-Pope’s office, and maybe change into a cleaner cassock —the one he was wearing had green spots from the grass, a few holes in it and twigs inside his ruffled collar—. But something took him by surprise: in front of his bedroom, there was Omega twiddling his thumbs and his head lowered. The older kit stopped on his tracks and eyed him over: he seemed guilty.
“What are you doing here?”

“I’m here to tell you I’m sorry Leaf said such mean things about Cowbell” the Quintessence kit mumbled, “I talked to him and he’s not ashamed of what he said, so I came to apologize myself”.

The older kit opened the door in his room and let him inside, then walked over his desk to pick up his notebooks and other relevant items he needed for his training. Omega took a seat on the bed and glanced over the discarded Grimm Brothers’ Fairy Tales book resting next to the blanket. His crimson red eyes opened wide as he felt a swarm of memories flash past him: when he and Special snuck inside the archives for Imperator’s research, when the older Ghoul taught him and Alpha how to read by reading them the exact same book he was holding in that moment, their chat in the tour bus before being resummoned as kits… He could feel himself at the verge of tears.

“Spesh, I’m sorry…” he mumbled, holding the book close to his chest. The older kit turned to him with a concerned look in his eyes, “I wanted to apologize because I felt it was my responsibility to do so but now… I want to do it for real. You are my best friend, you taught me a lot of things and you definitely don’t deserve being called names like that…”

Special’s heart shrank inside his tiny chest as he approached the bed and crawled over to sit next to the Quintessence kit to hug him tightly. He missed his old friend so much he wanted to make it up for the lost time, but at the same time, he felt like he was too late to his training.

“I forgive you” he replied, happy to be at peace with Omega again, “but you should go. I need to go to Papa’s office”.

“It’s alright” Omega still kept the book close to his chest, “Can I take this? Maybe Alpha will get his memories back too if I show him!”

“Of course!” Special nodded and walked to the door carrying a bag with his needed items, “You know? Seeing that you now remember me, I feel less uncomfortable hanging around you band Ghouls”.

“You shouldn’t be. If Leaf acts like a moron again, I’ll stand up for you!” Omega puffed his chest, proud of himself.

They said goodbye to each other and parted ways. Special felt a warmth inside as he walked towards Nihil’s office. He got two best friends in a matter of hours, it was like the Old One had lifted his loneliness curse off his shoulders. On the other hand, though, he began wondering if having a social life would slow him down in his training. He would be an adult Ghoul soon and the Third would want him to manage the tour, as well as handling the interviews. He slowed down his pace and stood still in front of the office door for a few seconds before letting himself in. There was a still a lot of work to do in so little time.
The Goodbye

Chapter Summary

Things are starting to go downhill from here

Chapter Notes

Thank you @ghostsxghoul for the brainstorming and @copias-gloves for beta-reading!

Tired eyes stared at the computer screen as the printer began spitting out the huge tour plan. A young adult Special stretched himself out and leaned back against his chair with his arms behind his head, letting out a big sigh. It felt so good to be productive, and the Third wasn’t as hard with him as his older brother. It was truly a huge relief. He glanced over the clock: it wasn’t too late, he could pay a visit to the band Ghouls and hang out with them for a while. *They should be in their rec room*, he wondered.

When he knocked at the door and was allowed to come in, he spotted Omega having a tug of war with Alpha and a towel, while Delta cheered them on. He was about to join them when Leaf jumped in front of him with his large, green eyes and his hands behind his back. He did one of his signature head tilts, something many Siblings of Sin found cute and adorable about him, and blocked Special’s path, even if he tried to walk around the Earth Ghoul.

“What’cha up to, Spesh? Been busy?”

“Yes, the tour plan is finished” the older Ghoul tried to look past him to grab Omega’s attention, “Can you let me through?”

“Say ‘please’ and I might” Leaf leaned closer to his face, but was soon lifted off the floor by Air and placed aside. Special nodded at him as his way to say thank you and took a seat near where the Quintessence and the Fire Ghoul were playing.

Omega got distracted when he saw him and Alpha used those precious seconds to tug harder at the towel and send the larger Ghoul to the floor, making a small victory dance afterwards while Delta clapped happily. Special chuckled and approached Omega, lending him a hand to take and help himself up. It felt so good to be friends again. Alpha greeted the older Ghoul before challenging Delta to another tug of war, leaving the rhythm guitarist some time to catch up.

They got upstairs to the bedroom hallways and Special noticed they had a small corner with bookshelves and two armchairs. Cowbell was standing next to them, sporting a pair of thick rimmed glasses over his mask while he took some notes about the books they had in there. The older Ghoul smiled under his mask and turned to Omega to ask if he could go greet his other friend, but when he turned back to the bookshelves, Cowbell was nowhere to be found.

“He always does that” Omega smiled and shook his head, “He’s odd, but endearing”.
“Isn’t he?” Special smiled back at him, “If it weren’t for him, I would have had a worse kithood”.

The Quintessence Ghoul took a seat, soon followed by his friend. He soon seemed gloomier than before and it was unusual on him. He had a contagious laugh, he had always been the most lively one from the whole gaggle, and Special couldn’t help but feel worried for him. He reached out a hand to rest on Omega’s shoulder.

“What’s wrong?” the older Ghoul asked him.

“It’s frustrating” Omega replied, shrinking a bit in his seat, “I tried over and over again to get Alpha’s memories back but he seems like he doesn’t remember what we used to have. I told him our deepest secrets, remembered the things we did on tour, but none of them have worked”.

“What did he say about it?”

“Well, he mentioned something like ‘That’s nice, but we should stay as friends’. I don’t understand it…”

Special brought a hand to his chin and tried to think while he heard the Fire Ghoul downstairs celebrating another victory at the tug of war. The older Ghoul sat up, asking Omega to excuse him, and peeked at the scene downstairs: Alpha helped Delta up and pulled him into a tight, tender hug. Something seemed off. Special gestured at the Fire Ghoul to follow him upstairs with him and he nodded, releasing his bandmate before joining the spokesghoul. When he saw him, Omega got on his feet and hesitated.

“I think you two need to discuss things regarding memories” Special mentioned, taking a seat. Alpha rolled his eyes.

“Oof, not you too, Spesh!” the Fire Ghoul replied crossing his arms, then looking at Omega, “You told him?”

“I had to! We both got our memories back, I tried everything I could to get yours too but it just doesn’t work!” the Quintessence Ghoul stomped his feet in frustration, “I miss you, Alpha. I really miss what we had”.

Alpha sighed and sat down, looking down at his tattooed hands —Special wondered if he had permission from the Third to do that— as he looked for the best way to tell him the bad news once again.

“I remember absolutely everything” he confessed, a bit ashamed of hiding that for such a long time, “In fact, I got them back the day I told you I wanted to stay as friends”.

“Then why you didn’t tell me!?” Omega’s crimson eyes filled with tears and he kneeled down in front of him, holding his hands.

“I’ve moved on, ‘Mega” Alpha’s eyes glanced over the stairwell, “I have to admit it was nice while it lasted, but my feelings are for someone else. We still have the chemistry our fans love, but I prefer to be with someone else offstage, you know?”

Both the Fire and the older Ghouls could point out the exact moment where the Quintessence one’s heart shattered to pieces. Special wanted to leave them alone to sort out their things, but Alpha excused himself instead and walked downstairs. This whole situation was too uncomfortable for him. Omega sat back down on the armchair and brought his hands to his face. He was doing his best not to break down, but it was way too hard. Special wrapped his arms around him, pulling him close to his chest as he gently pet the back oh his head, trying his best to soothe him.
“I’m sorry I made things worse…” Special apologized after a few minutes, “I shouldn’t have dragged him into all of this”.

“No, no, it’s good to know…” the Quintessence Ghoul wiped his face with his sleeve and looked up at his friend, “I just feel like an idiot, like I wasted too much time with this when it was obvious the first time”.

“Hey, listen to me” the older Ghoul took his hands, “It’s not that bad. You’re not alone, you still have me and I will support you no matter what, alright?”

“It’s going to be awkward during the first tour…” Omega laughed nervously and shook his head, “It’s fine… It would be like always, we only have to pretend”.

Special followed his friend to his bedroom and spent there as much time as he needed. Omega’s mood improved greatly with his support and vented all he had to vent, his head on the older Ghoul’s lap while he pet his hair and horns. When he felt better, Special said goodbye to him and rushed downstairs. Alpha looked pretty worn out too, but he preferred not to say a word about it: he was sitting next to Delta and nuzzled his head against the Water Ghoul’s affectionately. It was none of Special business, so he decided to leave them be. As he headed to the exit, he could feel Leaf’s eyes on him like needles burying in his back.

His main priority now was Cowbell. He assumed he would be in the library as always, so that was the first place he checked. He wasn’t wrong at all: the slender Ghoul was sorting books in their shelves, still with his glasses on, so focused that he didn’t notice when his kithood best friend walked in. Special approached him with a huge smile and began helping him organizing the bookshelves.

“You left before I could even say hi to you” he told him, checking the cover of one of the books.

“I saw you were with Omega, so I didn’t want to disturb you” Cowbell replied, taking the books off his hands and putting them back to their shelves. He let out a huge sigh, “Well, I’m done here for today”.

Special tilted his head in confusion.

“Ah, didn’t I tell you? Papa told me to take care of the library when you’re gone” the slender Ghoul took off his glasses and hung them from his cassock collar.

“So, you’re not coming on tour with us?”

Cowbell shook his head, “It’s alright. I like being in the library, you know that”.

“Yes, but still…”

Since Special started working again as the band’s spokesghoul and tour manager, he had less time to spend with Cowbell, so the slender Ghoul would wait for him at 5 AM in front of his bedroom chambers and walk together to the office. Sometimes he stayed for a while, sometimes he would leave so the older Ghoul would be able to focus. It had become a habit.

“By the way, now that I am here, I was going to ask…” Special brought a finger to his chin, pensive, “Are you going to help us load the equipment in the bus?”

“I didn’t think about it, but I will since you asked so nicely”.

Special smiled and turned around on his heels: he had plenty of things to do such as making sure everything was ready, getting the Ghouls to practice and booking the interviews. Oh, and also
preparing possible questions he would get asked in those. He had even more work than before, but at least, the Third didn’t pressure him as much as his older brother. In fact, him and the band Ghous had more free will than when they were under the two older Emeritus’ rule, but since the others were doing whatever they pleased, he felt the responsibility to be in charge instead. It was way too much work for his shoulders.

The sun was about to set when they started loading equipment to the tour bus and many Siblings of Sin and Church Ghous came to help them. Special had a clipboard on his hands and was checking out every item that got loaded into the cargo. His mint green eyes caught a glimpse of the band Ghous helping each other out with their baggage, all out of their uniforms, and spotted Cowbell chatting with Omega after carrying a large bag inside the bus.

It was still hot, and the slender Ghoul was sweating from the effort. His undershirt was damp and clinging to his body, and he took it off to wipe his face with it. He was pretty skinny, but well-built and oddly attractive, so the older Ghoul couldn’t help but stare at him. Can this be more cliché?, Special thought, but he just couldn’t peel his eyes off him. This is your best friend, Spesh, and you’re probably a thousand years old in Ghoul age, would you stop staring at him like a teenage human!?

But in that moment, an idea struck Special with doubt: did he really consider Cowbell as only a friend?

Once the last item of equipment was checked out of the list, the older Ghoul went up to his bedroom to start packing his things. He didn’t have enough time to do it before, so he had to rush: the bus was leaving in an hour. His ears perked up as he heard someone rapping at the door: it was Cowbell. He had taken a shower and he was back in his cassock, his arms behind his back and slightly slouched, as usual.

“Hey, I thought I might say goodbye” his tone had a hint of sadness in it. It was the first time they would be separated for so long, “So… uhh… Goodbye, Spesh”.

“Will you be fine?” Special took a step closer to him, a worried look in his eyes.

“Yeah! I’ll be busy in the library. Plus, Mist isn’t going either”

It was obvious that they were trying to convince themselves that everything would be just fine, but loneliness was just growing bigger inside their chests as the time went by. Special bit down his lip and wrapped his arms around his best friend, pulling him in a tight hug and lingering on it for a while. The bus’s horn echoed outside, the call for the older Ghoul to leave. He pulled away from the hug and walked over to his bed to pick up his bags before closing the door behind him, locking it and rushing downstairs.

Once his stuff was loaded in the tour bus, Special glanced over Cowbell once more. The hug they shared wasn’t cold nor just a friendship hug. For the feel of it, he believed that the slender Ghoul didn’t want him to leave either. He waved his hand at him with sad eyes before hopping in. He sat on the driver’s seat, his mint green eyes still on the Ghoul as he watched him through the side mirror, the bus leaving him and the church grounds behind and heading to the forest. The forest where they used to play as kits.

It was like everybody forgot that he was driving the bus and they were having their own little party on the kitchenette. It was entertaining, like a sitcom that he could only hear and he occasionally giggled to himself. The Third pulled out a large bag of marshmallows and was cheering on Alpha and Omega to see who could fit more inside their mouths. To make things more interesting, they weren’t able to remove their mask mouthpieces. It was nothing like touring with the previous Papas;
he had to admit he was having way more fun, he even forgot about how sad he felt for leaving Cowbell behind.

“Hmm, I think they need more marshmallows” Leaf suggested, grabbing a fistful of the soft, sugary treats and trying to shove them at their faces.

“Come on, you both win! Enough!” the Third said, waving his hands. Finally somebody was being responsible… well, not for too long, “Air, Leaf, you’re next”.

“Hey Spesh!” the small Earth Ghoul rushed to him, trying to get him to stop the bus and watch their candy-eating contest, “Come and watch me! I bet I can beat Air!”

“I’ll have to decline the offer. We have to be in the first city as soon as we can, we have rehearsals to do” the older Ghoul rolled his eyes, “Maybe next time”.

He earned a round of booing and raspberries, but he did the right thing. The Third Emeritus came out in his defense, claiming that he had to drive and that they could annoy him during break. The Papa left the group as soon as Air shoved the fiftieth marshmallow in his mouth and was declared winner. He took the shotgun seat, put his sunglasses on and watched the landscape go.

“How do you feel, Ghoul? Ready to be back in the road?” he asked the spokesghoul as he made himself comfortable.

“I feel less pressured than the last time” Special replied as he steered the wheel to pass a ridiculously slow car, “I have to admit, though, you’re doing a good job. Your Ghouls are enjoying themselves without worrying”.

“It’s a matter of knowing what they really want” the Third waved a hand at him, “If they are happy, they are most likely to obey you”.

Special remembered the conversation they had in the band Ghouls’ nursery room. We can be as bad as him and he can’t say anything about it, Leaf said back then, and the older Ghoul began to wonder if the Papa was spoiling them.

“They need a bit of discipline, though” the spokesghoul suggested, “They have never been out in public, there are things they can and can’t do”.

“Don’t worry, I have everything under control” the youngest Emeritus smiled at him, “By the way, did you book our hotels? I would try to sleep the less we can in the bus. This thing is uncomfortable and should be left only for emergencies”.

“That was the first thing I did. Three double suites and one for you, I suppose?”

“Exactly” he leaned closer to the spokesghoul, “Between you and me, I’ve been doing my homework and I’m meeting someone in my suite tonight. If everything goes smoothly, I might get some connections to the high society. We need those on our side for the Ghost project”.

“That’s… actually impressive” Special eyed at him, surprised. He always thought that the youngest Emeritus was more distracted and airheaded than his two older brothers, but that proved him wrong, “Who is it?”

“Ah, ah, I can’t tell anything about it. You are just mere servants” he replied in a sing-song voice and opened his arms, “But if I play my cards right, we’re going places”.

It seemed that the Third had a plan and was confident in it. He took an exit and, after a while, he saw
the hotel building. The Third Emeritus was the first to step out, contemplating the sights in delight while the Ghouls unloaded their bags. It was getting late, so most of them were dreaming about a good night’s rest. Before going up to his suite, the Third paired up the Ghouls: Alpha and Omega would have to share their room, Delta and Air were going together and Leaf was stuck with Special. Poor Omega, the older Ghoul thought, that is going to be so awkward for him...

“Are we going up?” the small Earth Ghoul eyed him up, his large green eyes staring deeply into Special’s soul.

“S-sure…” he hesitantly replied and helped him carry their stuff upstairs.

The suite was pretty large: white walls with a few landscape paintings hanging from them, adorned with black frames that stood out, as well as two large windows covered with silk white curtains. There was a drinks-cabinet—which they weren’t supposed to touch—, two beds with a ridiculous amount of pillows on them and a door that lead to their bathroom, equipped with a jet tub.

Leaf jumped on the bed closest to the windows and kicked off his shoes before sprawling himself all over it and letting out a deep sigh. Special carefully opened his bag and folded his clothes before placing them in the closet: he had an interview in the morning and he had to look his best. The Earth Ghoul rolled on his side, propped in just one elbow and stared at him, his tail freely waving from one side to another.

“You seem kind of spaced out, Spesh” his tone was playful, almost like if he was teasing him.

“Don’t worry, I’ll be fine, I swear!” Special turned to him, waving his hands dismissively, “It’s just that I’m nervous for tomorrow. I haven’t done an interview for a while”.

“I can smell you’re not like that for just an interview” Leaf raised an eyebrow, “What happened?”

It was then when Cowbell flooded his mind again with the memories of the last hug they shared and how sad he looked when the bus left. Special felt his chest sink with a bunch of unknown feelings: they would be seeing each other in just a few months, it wasn’t that bad. The slender Ghoul will be with his books, that’s what he wanted, right? He had the library all to himself. And Special would have to focus on the tour itself, he didn’t have time to be worrying about feelings like a young teen. Leaf sat up and approached the older Ghoul’s bed, taking a seat on it and patting the space next to it.

“You need to relax” he mentioned while he threw a few pillows to the carpeted floor, “Why don’t you lie down and I give you a back rub? They all say my hands can do magic”.

The thought of allowing such a nosy prick as Leaf near his back and letting him find out about his wings, especially knowing how bad he had been to Cowbell, made Special feel a bit uneasy. He shook his head in dismissal and grabbed a bathrobe and his nightwear.

“I’ll go take a bath, if you don’t mind”.

The tub was filled to the brim with warm water once the last rope on his torso fell on the ground and he could spread out his wings. He felt like he could at least move them better with that new vessel, but he still had his doubts about them actually working. His mint green eyes were on the mirror, examining his own body covered in tiny scars from the resummoning and he felt disgusted for some reason. The thought of Leaf seeing him this way began tormenting him, so he turned to the tub, made himself comfortable and turning on the jets. He managed to fully space out for a few minutes before a thumping sound brought him back from his reverie. Leaf? No, it was coming from the room next to theirs. Special finished his bath and stuck his ear against the wall, trying to figure out what was going on. His eyes widened, hurriedly bound his wings with the ropes back again, covered himself with his
nightwear and rushed out of the bathroom.

“Leaf?” he asked, the Earth Ghoul stopped tapping his fingers against the pillows and turned to him, “Come here and listen, but don’t make a sound”.

Both Ghouls were listening now: a faint creaking of the bed could be heard from the room next to theirs, as well as loud growls and moans. Special felt embarrassed and wanted to stop listening, but he was curious about who they were. Those sounds weren’t human at all. Could they be Delta and Air? Unlikely, Delta was too attached to Alpha at this point and Air lost all of his interest in sex. But if not them, they could only be...

“Oh fuck, Spesh…” Leaf whispered, looking up at him, “I think they are Alpha and Omega”.

“What!? Are you sure it’s not Papa?”

Leaf shook his head and went back to listening. The bed headboard was thumping against the wall on a steady pace, and the ruffling of bedsheets could be heard almost muffled by the Quintessence Ghoul’s cries of pleasure that were getting louder as he reached his climax. Alpha’s heavy breathing was pretty audible too, but softer after a thump against the mattress and some more bed creaking. Those walls were so thin they could even hear their conversation. It was an invasion of privacy, but for them, curiosity was better than morals.

In their room, the two Ghouls were lying down on one of the beds covered in a layer of sweat, their chest rising as they heaved, trying their best to regain their strengths. Alpha propped up on an elbow and eyed his bandmate with tired eyes, his fingers tracing down the jawline of his mask to pick up a stray sweat drop.

“That was impressive…” Omega commented, tried to catch his breath, “better than the old times”.

“It wasn’t bad. You got what you wanted, I got laid… everybody wins” the Fire Ghoul replied, removing his fingers from the face as he sat up on the bed, “Friends are for that, aren’t they?”

“Wait so… are you saying this meant nothing to you?” the rhythm guitarist stared up at him, soon sitting up as well.

“Look, I was horny but they paired up Delta with Air, and you said you wanted to remember old times, so I thought we could fuck. As friends. ‘Fuckbuddies’ if you want to name it”.

“That’s a soft way to say you played with my heart once again”.

“I’m sorry, ‘Mega, but I told you: I don’t feel what I used to feel for you years ago. If you want that kind of attention, it would be the best if you could find someone else to fill the void”.

Omega must have ran away from the room a few minutes later, because the two curious Ghouls could hear a loud door bang coming from the next room. Leaf peeled himself away from the wall and made his way back to the bed while Special stood at the bathroom door in disbelief. Their eyes met, but none of them could say a thing: there was nothing to say either. However, Special began to worry: what if that could happen to him and Cowbell too? What if he really had feelings for him but Cowbell didn’t feel the same? He was starting to become paranoid again.

“Again, Spesh?” Leaf tilted his head and got up from the mattress, approaching him.

“I swear it’s nothing!”

“I don’t buy it” he took his hands and lead him to the bed with the smaller Ghoul.
Leaf set Special’s head on his lap and ran his fingers through the hair creases of his iron mask. The older Ghoul closed his eyes; he truly had magic hands; his thoughts were melting away as he entered a state of full relaxation. He had his guard down, so Leaf thought it was the perfect opportunity to attack.

“What happened?”

Special hesitated, a bit anxious, but he sighed in relief when he felt the Earth Ghoul’s fingertips pressing against his temples.

“Have you ever thought somebody was your friend for a while and one day, you started thinking that it may be more than a friend to you?”

“Oh yes” Leaf replied, his lips curling to a smirk under his mask, “It happens sometimes. You are talking about Cowbell, right?”

“How did you know?”

“You’ve been moody since we left the church grounds. I noticed you staring at him while he helped us load. You’re head over heels for him, hm?”

“Well, I wouldn’t say that but…” the older Ghoul looked up at him, “I miss him a lot, Leaf”.

The Earth Ghoul pressed his fingers harder against his temples, then started rubbing his horns until Special felt relaxed again and closed his eyes.

“Don’t you worry” he whispered, “After a few days, it will be like he doesn’t exist anymore”.
End Notes

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